

BOXES of cereal. Jars of peanut butter. Cans of baby formula. They're the same items that have been available to U.S. military commissary shoppers overseas for years.

But recently, for the first time overseas, many nutritionally rich items stocked on the commissary shelves in Baumholder, Germany, and in other

WIC-OVERSEAS provides supplemental foods, nutrition education, and counseling and health-care referrals when nutritional or medical need is documented, Metcalf said.

The nutritional risk assessment of potential program participants is based on an evaluation of an infant or child's height and weight, biochemical data, dietary data and medical history.

Several months later, WIC-Overseas programs sprang up in Schweinfurt and at other Army installations in Germany, and at other U.S. military installations in England. It's expected to be available at 47 locations in Germany, England, Iceland, Italy, Spain and Portugal by fall 2002, Metcalf said.

WIC-O Help for Overseas

Story and Photos by Heike Hasenauer

commissaries throughout Europe have been identified by little red labels marked "WIC Approved."

And the families of soldiers such as PFC Eric Hernandez of the 90th Postal Company in Baumholder, and SGT Melvin Crabb, a 2nd Battalion, 6th Infantry, soldier there, are benefiting from the program those letters stand for Women, Infants and Children.

Hernandez's wife, Jennifer, and Crabb's wife, Emma Mae, purchase specially marked WIC items for themselves and their infant daughters.

The program targets pregnant or nursing women, or those who have given birth in the past six months, and infants and children up to age five who are at nutritional risk. By supplementing their diets to ensure they eat nutritious meals, WIC helps prevent more serious medical problems, said WIC-Overseas program manager LTC Muriel Metcalf.

Eligibility for the program is based on total family income, before taxes, and excludes some monetary benefits that are additions to basic pay.

Applicants must be members of the U.S. armed forces, U.S. civilian employees of the U.S. government or U.S. civilian employees of a Defense Department contractor overseas, or their dependents. And candidates must live in an area where WIC-Overseas services are offered. For example, anyone who has a Baumholder APO mailing address can participate in the program at that installation.

WIC began in the United States as an U.S. Department of Agriculture pilot program in 1972 and became permanent throughout the United States in 1974. Today, more than seven million people participate in the state-side program monthly. It became available to military families overseas in early 2001 through two pilot programs, one in Baumholder and the other at a U.S. Air Force installation in England.

WIC-O provides supplemental foods, nutrition education and counseling



The USDA funds the education and food supplement program in the United States. Overseas, it's provided under the auspices of Army Community Services, in conjunction with Choctaw Management Services Enterprise, a contractor whose dietitians meet with potential WIC-Overseas members to assess their risks for such conditions as anemia and low birth weight.

The community-based program is aimed at improving the quality of life of soldiers and families, said MAJ Jack Trowbridge, commander of the Baumholder Community Health Clinic. He is also Baumholder's WIC-Overseas coordinator and, as a result of working with the TRICARE-Europe office, the European Command Quality of Life Division and Metcalf, is largely responsible for the successful implementation of the program in Europe.

A recent WIC-Overseas report



SGT Melvin Crabb of the 2nd Battalion, 6th Infantry, and his wife, Emma Mae, discuss WIC-Overseas benefits for their infant daughter with a program representative in Baumholder, Germany.

indicates participation in the long-standing U.S.-offered WIC program has been associated with increased use of prenatal care, longer gestation, higher birth weights, reductions in infant mortality, improved cognitive development and school readiness,

Families

reduced iron deficiency anemia in children and improved immunization rates.

A major difference between WIC and WIC-Overseas is that in the United States each state developed its own implementation manual using U.S. Department of Agriculture guidelines. This meant that a family that met eligibility requirements in Texas, for example, wasn't necessarily eligible in another state, Metcalf said. For the WIC-Overseas program, the eligibility criteria will be the same at all locations. There are some 29,000 potentially eligible participants in Europe.

Several members of a family can be eligible for WIC-Overseas and, in determining eligibility, a pregnant woman counts as two individuals, said CMSE dietician Julie Snodderly.

In Europe, the families of almost all E-4s and below are eligible for WIC-Overseas, based on family size and income, Metcalf said, but families of junior officers are also enrolled in the program.

WIC Eligibility Overseas (According to income)

	Annually	Monthly
Family of 2	\$20,813	\$1,735
Family of 3	\$26,178	\$2,182
Family of 4	\$31,543	\$2,629
Family of 5	\$36,908	\$3,076
Family of 6	\$42,273	\$3,523

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WIC-Overseas provides program participants three "food package" vouchers monthly, each worth about \$19.50, for items designed to supplement their diets, Metcalf said. It includes foods high in protein, calcium, iron, and vitamins A and C, nutrients frequently lacking in diets of the target population.

Seven packages of WIC-Overseas items — that is, seven different voucher types, each listing the foods authorized to be purchased by respective recipients — include iron-fortified formula, cereal, fruits and vegetables, dairy products, tuna, peanut butter, dried beans and peas, fruit juices, and milk and eggs, among other items.

"If a mother is breast-feeding, for example, she'd get a voucher that includes milk, eggs, juice and other food items in one package," Metcalf said.

Each month's WIC-Overseas voucher must be used in the month specified. They can be redeemed at any participating commissary for specific foods listed on the voucher, Metcalf said.

WIC-Overseas dieticians meet with program participants every three months to provide new vouchers, monitor their health, provide nutrition guidance and assess the need for continued enrollment in the program. A complete certification is required every six months. On average, participants are enrolled in the program for about 18 months, Metcalf said.

"The first visit is really an in-depth discussion about everything people eat," said CMSE dietician April Parsells. At three months, dieticians record a baby's height and weight, among other things, and will likely recommend that parents gradually add solid food, starting with cereal, to the infant's diet.

The Baumholder WIC-Overseas office is near the Personnel Services Branch, In- and Out-Processing office,



A commissary employee in Baumholder displays one of the products WIC-Overseas members may purchase using program coupons. Other products include such staples as milk and eggs.

Child Development Center and health clinic, said Trowbridge. "There's a synergistic effect; we can all put our hands around a customer and say: 'You might be a candidate for WIC-Overseas.'"

"Being this close to other agencies has proven beneficial," Parsells said. "If a potential participant doesn't have to walk clear across post to take advantage of a service one of the other agencies recommended, he or she is more likely to use the service."

WIC is the most successful federally funded nutritional program in America, according to a USDA report that indicates one of four new mothers participates in WIC and that the program serves 45 percent of all infants born in the United States. □